

Testimony before Kansas House Health and Human Services Committee
Mrs. Ruth Tisdale, Director of Client Services
Advice & Aid Pregnancy Centers, Inc., Johnson County, KS
March 7th, 2013.

To the Honorable Dave Crum & and esteemed committee members. My name is Ruth Tisdale and I represent Advice and Aid Pregnancy Centers located in Johnson County. I am here to share with you today about the great work that Advice and Aid is providing to our community. The mission of Advice and Aid Pregnancy Centers is to serve families facing unplanned pregnancy before and after with Christ-like compassion. Since it's beginning in 1983 Advice and Aid has been serving those in our community who need help. The very reason Advice and Aid was established was because a group of caring individuals wanted to lend a helping hand to those facing unplanned pregnancies who didn't know where to turn and to provide alternatives to abortion. Now, 30 years later we are still doing that and so much more. We have always provided all of our services without a charge to those receiving them.

Advice and Aid Pregnancy Centers educates women by providing truthful and accurate information on all of their choices: parenting, adoption, or abortion. Dr. Brendan Mitchell serves as our Medical Director, reviewing and establishing medically accurate materials, which are provided to clients. We rely on reputable organizations like Focus on the Family, Heartbeat International, and Care Net for other educational materials we use with clients or as we train volunteers.

We believe that education is a powerful tool especially for women and men as they struggle with what to do in the situation they face. We want them to be empowered to make a decision they can live with the rest of their lives. We want them to carefully consider all their options because each one will have a significant effect in their future.

Our services are designed just for that purpose. When a woman is in crisis due to a possible unplanned pregnancy, she can call our 24-hour hotline and speak to one of our trained volunteers. She will be given opportunity to visit one of our 2 locations where she can gather more information. When she arrives at one of our centers she will find a safe, caring, confidential, non-judgmental, environment and has the opportunity to ask questions and get more facts about each option.

In that initial appointment, we provide a high quality pregnancy test to verify the pregnancy. As we wait for the test results our trained volunteers discuss their specific circumstances with them. We get to hear from them, how they are coping with the situation, what their plans are for the pregnancy, what kind of support they have, do they have insurance or not, and many other things. Often we meet a woman who states she wants an abortion. We have a variety of resources available to compassionately, but truthfully share information on abortion procedures, potential risks, as well as possible long-term effects. We also share with her about the development of her unborn child and help her to understand the many stages of pre-birth. One woman I worked with shared that prior to her abortion she asked at the clinic, "is it a baby? She said the nurse told her, "no, it's an embryo". She wasn't sure what that meant, and did not ask any further question. She went ahead with the abortion. She later told me that

as soon as she took the first pill, she realized she had done the wrong thing. I met with her many times after her abortion for post-abortion help and she often shared how she wished she had understood.

That's why we share with them factual fetal development, informing them that a baby's heart is beating 18-21 days after conception and that the entire central nervous system has formed (as indicated in the brochure, *The First 9 Months*, provided by Focus and the Family). Another way we educate pregnant clients is by providing sonograms. We have trained volunteer sonographers and a nurse on staff who can perform first trimester sonograms. The goal of the sonogram is to verify a developing pregnancy and allow the woman to see how her pregnancy is progressing. A woman who is considering abortion needs to be fully informed and know whether or not her pregnancy is developing normally. There are times when the need for a diagnostic sonogram arises. If she doesn't have a doctor, we can provide a referral to a list of doctors and they provide diagnostic sonogram and doctor consultation sometimes at no cost to the client.

We are committed to serving these clients throughout their pregnancy and even into the first few years of the child's life, if they need us. Our Options Program is designed to help those who have chosen to continue their pregnancy; whether they plan to parent or are considering adoption. This program consists of a weekly meeting with one of our trained volunteers where our clients watch videos related to pregnancy and newborn care. They also earn points for attending the program and towards the end of the pregnancy they can use those points to shop for baby items. This past year we served 55 clients through our Options Program. One particular client shared the following, "I really enjoy coming here, everyone is kind and caring, I love the options counseling, I don't feel so worried about parenting after watching the videos and learning so much!".

One of the programs that makes Advice and Aid unique is our Bridges Parenting Support Group. Once a woman has her baby, she has the opportunity to remain in a relationship with us through this program. Over the course of two years, the Bridges Program intentionally focuses on educational and relational elements which are designed to address the practical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs of those we see. While mother and often father take part in Bridges, we have volunteers who watch the children in the nursery, so Mom and Dad can focus on what is being taught. Those in Bridges also earn points so they can shop for the ongoing needs that come with having a baby.

This past year, due to the increase number of clients wanting to participate in Bridges, we added an additional night to the program. By the end of 2012, we had served 62 women, 18 men, and 75 children.

The reality is that even with the support we offer, a woman can still feel trapped by her situation and doesn't see any other option. We share with her that regardless of her decision for the pregnancy that we are here to help. We strongly believe that no woman wants to make an abortion decision. We believe she feels like that is the only choice she has because there are no other viable options for her out there. To that end, we have volunteers who work with women who have had an abortion and regret their decision. We offer a 12-week Bible Study to support these women as they seek forgiveness and find hope despite the regrets of their decision.

None of this would be possible without the support of individuals and organizations in our community. They are the ones that give of their time, treasure, and talent so that our doors at Advice and Aid can remain open for another 30 years.

It has been my honor to provide this testimony to you. Thank you for your service to our State and for your diligence as you consider this important issue for the citizens in our community.

Sincerely,

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